"Turtle Mountain."

(Calgary Herald,1934, by Freda G.Bundy.)

"An appropriation of $150.00 is to be used in moving houses from the shadow of Turtle Mountain, which geologists believe will start another slide some day."

When the Alberta estimates were tabled in the legislature a few days ago, the greatest rock slide in Canada was recalled. Some vaguely recalled the event; others had never heard the details; but to a few it will always remain a vivid memory.

On a cold, bleak morning---the 29th. of April,1903, the little town of Frank slept peacefully in the shadow of a great mass of rock known as Turtle Mountain, a peak which was to be known as the most menacing in the Rockies.

In certain tiny homes, women and children were alone, for part of the male population of the town were on night shift in the mine, far under the mountain.

Some say that the peak was named Turtle because it moved slowly. Others vow that it was on account of the rounded, bulky shape somewhat like the back of a turtle. Be that as it may, on this cold gray morning, at ten minutes after four, this giant mound rose from its inertia of untold ages, shook its huge head and sent thousands of tons of rock hurtling down upon the tiny town, sleeping so peacefully below.

No warning, no chance of escape as the whole northeast face of the mountain collapsed, moving in a terrific,thundering avalanche across the beautiful valley, carrying ahead of it, or cruelly crushing beneath, dozens of homes, and rushing into eternity, without a moment's warning, some 65 helpless souls.

Just before giant, unseen forces had hurled down this avalanche, a C.P.R. freight train had passed through the town of Frank and was scarcely beyond the danger zone, when a sound that the crew will never forget, filled the air above the noise of the train.

With incredulous stupefaction, they gazed at the fearful scene behind them---a sea of great, jagged rocks over which hung a thick gray veil that might have been a funeral shroud, so many bodies did it cover.

With minds trained to quick thinking, they recalled the fact that the Spokane Flyer was soon due and with thousands of feet of railway destroyed and the course of the river diverted, immediate action was imperative.

Would the rest of the mountain fall? Would it be possible to climb over that terrible mass of rocks? Would the thick limestone dust choke a man to death?

In spite of the thought of these possibilities, a brakeman Sid Choquette, then performed a feat as daring as anything on the battle front. Through the thick pall of dust which hid, he knew not what, the man slowly and painfully climbed over that jagged expanse of a mile. Up over the steep face of a boulder, sliding down the other side, slipping on the sharp, uneven edges, groping to keep a straight course in that eerie gloom, listening fearfully for the rumble of subsequent slides, the valiant brakeman kept on, and finally flagged the coming passenger train.

Later, the passengers of that train, which otherwise would have been a total wreck, presented the hero with a solid gold watch, suitably engraved and the railway company promised him a pension for life.

As the dust was slowly settling over this great mausoleum, dozens of miners---husbands, fathers and brothers---were preparing to emerge from the entrance of the mine, when they suddenly found the way blocked. The

fact did not cause any great surprise, since, for several months past, the timbers in the mine had been occasionaly broken, especially about the entrance. This was evidently a small cave-in.

It was a simple matter to retrace their steps and emerge from a more westerly exit. The dawn of a new day cast its early morning light on a sight that struck terror to their hearts. Before their astonished and unbelieving eyes there was nothing but a great, wierd expanse of rock. It was as if some cruel wizard had suddenly swept their tiny homes and families into oblivion, and left in their place, this strange,fearful world of grey.

A geological report states; "The slide was due, not to a single cause, but to a combination of causes, among which the opening up of l arge chambers in the mine, situated under the base of the mountain,may have been the contributary cause." There was a mild earthquake in this region in 1901, and this may have aided the movement.

The geologists also tell us that this particular mountain has a number of peculiarities that combine to lead toward continued slides,such as no other mountain mass in the Rockies. Turtle is a great block of limestone, overthrust upon shale, sandstone and coal beds, the whole thing being an unusually weak mass of rock, and the upper thrust laying almost perpendicular to the base.

An auto road has been blasted through the "slide" and the railway has found a new road bed. Passengers travelling through by train or car, gaze in astonishment on this great expanse of desolation, which covers a mile-square area. They listen with interest while the tragic tale is told and exclaim with amazement at the story of the little baby that was found safe and sound, the sole survivor.

The ascent of Turtle Mountain is not a hazardous climb, but it is a

fairly strenuous one, a long, steady pull, straight up the profile of the slide. The peak is something over 7.000 feet and once on top, a wonderful view for miles around rewards one for the effort. Away to the west is a regular ocean of mountain peaks, the divisional range, many of them towering 10.000 feet and more.

An appalling sight on this mountain top is the presence of huge fissures, warning of future slides. On the north peak one sees cracks that are a foot in width, hundreds of feet long and apparently very, very deep, for the pebbles that one throws down, bump and echo for a long time.

Several years ago, during the construction of the main highway through the slide, workmen came upon the remains of victims of this 1903 disaster. The bones were respectfully interred, a cross erected and the tiny burial plot enclosed by a fence.

This vast panorama of rock is an inexhaustible supply for railway maintenance work, being shipped as far east as Moose Jaw. Trainloads have been taken out for years,and there is not the slightest appreciable difference in the amount seen there.

Several times during the past twenty years there have been commissioners appointed to investigate the changes in Turtle Mountain and each time they report the condition more serious---the fissures increasing in size and every indication of a movement in the mountain. They once advised the removal of the present townsite in case of a mild earthquake or mine explosion in the nearby areas, which might send thousands of tons of rock down, endangering lives and property.

During recent years, investigations have brought to light conditions serious enough to warrant an order for twenty or more families to abandon their locations while their homes were moved to a safer site. In spite of the warnings and suggestions, there are still some families who

are living in localities which are considered precarious.

There is a little rose stucco cottage at the turn of the road towards Hillcrest. A few hundred yards farther east are several more small homes, while at the back a great grey wall of sliding, cracking limestone frowns down upon them, as if giving a warning to vacate before they become victims of its temperamental cruelty.

When questioned, the residents of the rose cottage stated that they might move their little home to safety when times improved and money was more plentiful. At present it was beyond their means and they had not yet asked government aid to move. They understood that the appropriation was for houses that had already been moved. When asked if they were not afraid to live so close to the menacing mountain, they replied in the negative.

A resident of one of the homes to the east philosophically states that he is not at all alarmed concerning future slides, and if there should be another disaster, "well, what difference would it make? One has only to die once."

Among the residents of Blairmore, who vividly recall the slide of of Turtle Mountain, is "Cap" Beebe, one of the oldest and best known persons in the Pass. "I remember it as if it happened yesterday," he said. " I was awakened between three and four o'clock by a most terrific noise and vibration that I believed to have been thunder. I lay still waiting for further crashes and for the sound of rainfall but none came and I went back to sleep.

"About five in the morning I was wakened by a loud pounding on my door and found Felix Montibetti there, greatly excited.

"It's gone," gasped Felix.

"What's gone?" I asked in perplexity.

"The town of Frank."

"The town of Frank," I repeated slowly as if trying to analyze his words. "Was there an explosion? Do you mean that it was blown up?"

"No," he answered fearfully. "The mountain fell on it."

"That was the terrible rumble of thunder that I had heard. After quickly dressing, I joined him and we hurried down to Frank---and what a sight! I shall never forget it. Rocks were still rumbling and falling down the sides of the mountain and continued to do so for days. There was no such thing as relatives searching for their families---they were buried beyond recovery."

The noise of the fall was heard even in Cowley and many thought that there had been a mine explosion.

Along the route of the old highway, the large rocks were utilized as an advertising medium,but at present there are restrictions in regards to such things, which is as it should be in this particular place, for the whole slide is really the burial ground for the many bodies that lie there.

Mrs. Verquin, who was formerly Gladys Ennes, tells of an amazing occurance, in connection with the slide.

Mr.and Mrs. Sam Ennes and their four children lived in Frank,along the same row of houses as a family by the name of Leitch. Both families were fast asleep,as were the other residents of Frank, when suddenly the thousands of tons of rock came tumbling down the mountain sides to crush, like matchwood, the frail houses below.

Samuel Ennes wakened to find himself partially pinned under the timbers of his buried home. With difficulty he managed to free himself, then his first thought was of his family. His wife and children were back there, somewhere under the crushed home. Fate was kind, for the broken timbers had fallen in such a way that he was able to extricate three

children and his wife. It was with much manipulating that Mrs.Ennes was finally freed and then she realized that the three year old baby Gladys, was missing.

In the awful darkness she groped about and finally in some soft mud and slime, she finally located the tiny body. There was no movement or sign of life in the little form and feeling in her heart that her baby was dead, she wrapped it about and holding it close to her body, she stumbled over the rocks towards a light that came from the Maclean house, beyond the stricken area.

In the warmth and light of that home, she found that the baby was still alive, in fact, not harmed by the slightest scratch,although Mrs. Ennes then found that she herself had a broken collar bone. The baby is now Mrs. Emil Verquin, living on a large ranch north of Lundbreck.

Mr. Ennes was not able to walk without difficulty for weeks, suffering from wounds made in his legs and feet by the many nails protruding from the boards and timbers that barred his way to freedom.

Mrs.Verquin said that her uncle had his thigh broken by the falling timbers as he was buried underneath. The family lived in a tent for weeks after the catastrophe. The Ennes family now lives in Blairmore.

Down the same row, a number of houses beyond the Ennes home, lived the Leitch family. Mr. Leitch was a Scotchman and kept one of the general stores in Frank. Fate was not so kind to his family, for their home was crushed into oblivion but on a rock that was pushed far along to a window of the Bansmer home, lay a little baby, the youngest member of the Leitch family. The child, Marion Leitch, later became Mrs. Lawrence McPhail and now lives in Nelson, B.C.

There is an historical connection with Turtle Mountain that is of interest, and it also explains where the Pass got its name. The origin is

authentic, for Rev. W.R.Haynes, missionary for many, many years at St. Cyprian's Mission, Brocket, talked with chiefs who had taken part in the battle; F.W.Godsal, one of the earliest settlers also had one of the chiefs point out the site; and W.S.Lee had the same story from the Indians.

Rev. Mr. Haynes who worked for so long among the Indians and knew the language so well, gave us the story. Between the years 1852-54, the Blood, Blackfeet and Piegans were living together as one nation, speaking the same language. They wandered from place to place in search of buffalo, their chief source of food. These three tribes, Bloods,Blackfeet and Piegans, known then as the Blackfoot nation, had their camp at this time near where the city of Lethbridge now stands.

Across the border, in Montana, was a tribe of Indians known as the Crows. For some time, unknown to the Blackfeet, this tribe had been coming across the line and stealing their horses but there came a day when their depredations were discovered,and the Blackfeet gathered their forces to attack the marauders who were camped in the shadow of this long mountain.

A terrific battle took place in which the Crows were all killed and the Blackfeet returned to their camp, complete victors. The ambush in which the Crows had been hiding was called thereafter, "Crow's Nest", by the Indians. The field of battle is now covered by the Frank slide and was called the "Crow's Nest Pass," The old Indians all vouched for this and three chiefs who had fought in the battle were well known to early pioneers.

By name they were Big Swan,Running Wolf of the Piegans,Cross Chief, who was not a chief but a great Piegan warrior. Cross Chief often pointed out the battle site to F.W.Godsal,saying he was only nineteen when he fought in the battle at the foot of Turtle Mountain.He also promised to

take Mr.Godsal to the scene of this early fued, so that he might search for arrowheads and bones of the vanquished, but they left it too late--the slide came.

By some strange manner a report reached Ottawa that the Crowsnest Mountain was named on account of its shape, but this is contrary to the evidence of all early settlers and the Indians that dwelt in this particular locality.

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